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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

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RARE METAL USED AS BONE SUBSTITUTE

On the lonely, northeast shore of Great Slave Lake there is a small mining camp. The buildings are humble and unimpressive. Yet this location is an important Canadian source of tantalum—a neglected, rare metal now in demand owing to the new uses found for it. A sample of its heavy, brown ore from this area was recently donated to the Royal Ontario Museum.

Tantalum has the peculiar property of allowing an electric current to flow through it in only one direction. It forms a number of important alloys with nickel, chromium, molybdenum, iron and other metals and these alloys are used in surgical and dental instruments. With carbon it forms tantalum carbide which approaches the diamond in hardness and does not melt at 3000°C. Wire made from tantalum is stronger than steel wire. The metal can be easily coloured and used in jewelry. It is used in radio tubes. Recently it has been found that it makes an ideal substance for surgeons to use in the human body to replace portions of the skull or other bones. It has a very high resistance to corrosion and will last almost indefinitely.

HORSES THAT "SWEAT BLOOD"

In the Chinese section of the Royal Ontario Museum there are many small figures of horses, brightly coloured and full of animation. Behind them there is a story which takes us back over 20 centuries. In 138 B.C. the Emperor of China sent an emissary, Chang Ch'ien, to the northwest border of the country in search of a nomad tribe. He finally found it. Among other wonders, he reported to his Emperor that he had seen large and powerful horses that "sweat blood". When peaceful efforts failed to obtain samples of these "Heavenly Horses", as the Chinese called them, an army was despatched to seize some. At great cost of soldiers' lives, some hundreds of these horses were brought back to China and bred. For centuries they were the delight and pride of Chinese officials who owned them. When an official died small portrait models in clay of his favourite steeds were put in the tomb with him.

The blood sweating was probably due to a disease common to horses in northern Persia even to-day. It is caused by a small parasitic roundworm which gets under the skin of a horse and causes small haemorrhages that colour the foamy sweat of the animal when it is exercised. Apparently this disease does not materially weaken a horse.

SACRED SHELL DONATED TO THE MUSEUM

A sacred chank shell, obtained in Madras, India, has been donated recently to the Royal Ontario Museum. This whitish shell, which is pear-shaped and about five inches long, is revered by the Hindus. They believe that the Vedas, which are their ancient sacred writings, were stolen by a gigantic chank. Vishnee, a deity, then took the form of a fish and recovered their lost writings.

THE CLIFFS OF DOVER ONCE OCEAN OOZE

At one time in the geologic past, the famous White Cliffs of Dover were merely an ocean ooze which was made up, for the most part, of microscopic animals with intricate, limy shells. Examples of these shells, now fossilized, may be seen among the collections of the Royal Ontario Museum.

With a change in level of the ocean floor, over fifty million years ago, these oozes were raised above the sea. The masses of tiny shells then became cemented together to make the celebrated chalk formation, seen on either side of the English Channel.

As in so many instances, the lowly organisms of other ages have greatly contributed towards building the foundations of our modern world. In this particular case they have helped to form the very bulwarks of our nation.

WEALTH OF CANADA REFLECTED IN MINERALS

The name of Canada will be forever linked with the term minerals. Fortunes have been won in the hinterlands from the minerals of our country. Many minerals have at one time or another played their part and added their bit to our increasing wealth. However, a far larger number of minerals occur in Canada which are either of no economic value or occur in too small deposits for profitable operation. In the Royal Ontario Museum there is a collection in which nearly all the minerals, which are known to occur in Canada, are displayed. Here there is gold from a number of Canadian sites; silver from Cobalt and Thunder Bay; copper from the historic Coppermine River; copper and nickel minerals from Sudbury; fluorite and talc from Madoc; rose quartz from Lake Winnipeg; amethyst from Amethyst Harbour; amazonstone and sodalite from Bancroft; graphite from Renfrew; phlogopite from Kingston and Buckingham; asbestos from Thetford; lead and zinc minerals from British Columbia; pitchblende from Great Bear Lake. We could go on naming minerals and their sources, but the list would be practically endless. Such an exhibit must be seen in order to appreciate the variety of minerals to be found in this great country of ours.

3. LOCAL MUSEUMS: MONEY AND GEOGRAPHY

A museum needs money. It must erect and maintain a building, pay for specimens or field work, and provide salaries for a trained staff. Where is this money to be obtained? Frankly we don't know. Almost one-half of the museums of Ontario are financed by local history societies. Not enough money is obtained in this manner to operate these institutions satisfactorily.

If it be granted that museums are educational institutions, then they have a right to a share of the monies set aside for education. Bold planning is needed. Museums should be erected in localities served inadequately at present. The sites should be chosen carefully so that maximum coverage for the province is obtained. Even a large institution, such as the Royal Ontario Museum, can only adequately serve part of the population.